

Pool, Stephen Decatur ^[1]

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by William S. Powell, 1994

1819–21 Dec. 1901

Stephen Decatur Pool, newspaper and magazine editor, educator, and politician, was born in [Elizabeth City](#) ^[2], the son of Joshua and Ann (Nancy) Lowry Pool. An obituary notice reported that he was "born to comparative poverty" but "rose by marriage with a wealthy heiress, to the crest of the wave of prosperity." It was under the guidance of Charles R. Kinney, attorney and president of the Elizabeth City branch of the Bank of North Carolina, that Pool undertook the study of law, but it is not clear that he ever practiced.

In September 1849 he was principal of the Elizabeth City Academy, and later his wife joined him as head of the Female Department. In 1850 he opened a night school for young men and apprentices whose daytime work prevented them from attending a day school. He offered reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, and geography at five dollars for an eleven-week period. In 1851 a military school, under the direction of a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, was added to the academy. In the academic department there were two teachers and sixty pupils. The school flourished and after a time it was moved to a larger building.

While operating the academy, Pool in 1850 also became editor of *The Old North State* ^[3], an Elizabeth City newspaper. During the next few years the masthead listed him in various positions, including printer, editor, proprietor. But after 1854 there was a different editor and proprietor, and finally in 1855 the paper ceased publication for "pecuniary considerations." Pool was a *Whig* ^[4], but the editor of the competing paper, Lucien D. Starke of the *Democratic Pioneer*, was a *Democrat* ^[5]. The two men feuded through the columns of their papers as well as in person, and on one occasion Starke attacked Pool with a cane and challenged him to a duel. Pool rebuffed the challenge because of his wife and six children and his deep indebtedness. A topic of lively discussion was slavery. Although he was a Unionist, Pool thought that each state had a right to be slave or free as it chose, while Starke favored the extension of the Missouri Compromise line.

For the benefit of the academy, Pool also delivered public lectures. In February 1852, for example, he announced that in March he would speak on "the Ptolemaic and Copernician theories of the structure of the universe" to raise funds to purchase equipment. If enough interest were shown, he said, this would be the first in a series of lectures. During the period October–December 1852 Pool, recorded as residing in [Pasquotank County](#) ^[6], was clerk of the House of Commons. Later he moved to [Carteret County](#) ^[7], where he taught in a female seminary.

At age forty-two Pool was commissioned captain of Company H, Tenth Regiment of North Carolina Troops, to rank from 16 May 1861. He was captured at Fort Macon on 26 Apr. 1862 but paroled and exchanged in August. On 1 October of that year he was promoted to lieutenant colonel and in September 1863 to colonel. In a move that was not unknown among military men, he represented Carteret County in the House of Commons for brief sessions in 1864 and 1865. In the spring of 1865 he commanded the First Sub District, Department of North Carolina.

Returning home after the war, Pool became editor of the [New Bern](#) ^[8] *Daily Journal of Commerce* from 1866 to 1875 and of the weekly edition from 1866 to 1876. An able editor, he became a charter member of the [North Carolina Press Association](#) ^[9] and was present at its first meeting in [Goldsboro](#) ^[10] in May 1873. During the period just before the election of 1870, he published the *Campaign Anti-Radical* in New Bern. Also in New Bern in 1873–74 he published *Our Living and Our Dead* ^[11] as a weekly in newspaper format for the North Carolina Branch of the Southern Historical Society and then as a monthly in magazine format in 1874–76. Its purpose was to present war reminiscences, registers of North Carolina troops, miscellaneous sketches, diaries, letters from correspondents, state news, and literary contributions. In 1876 the *Southern Historical Monthly* appeared as the successor to *Our Living and Our Dead*. Between 1874 and 1876, under a [Raleigh](#) ^[12] imprint, Pool also edited the monthly *North Carolina Journal of Education* which appeared in three volumes.

In 1874, as a Conservative candidate, he was elected superintendent of public instruction, one of the first state Democratic officials to be elected after the war. Under a Republican administration, he served from 1 Jan. 1875 to 30 June 1876. Pool was charged with irregularities in the management of funds provided by the Peabody Education Board and forced to resign. He was accused of using some of the fund, which he intended to return, to purchase a home for himself. Later in the year or in 1877 he moved to New Orleans, where his son, [Stephen D., Jr.](#) ^[13], was a highly regarded newspaper editor. The elder Pool was listed in New Orleans city directories from 1877 through 1887. His last years were spent largely in farming. He lived across Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans in Tangipahoa Parish on the Mississippi border. He died and was buried in Osyka, Miss.

Pool's wife was Caroline S. Lockwood and their children were James Harrell (1842), John Lockwood (1843), Henry Clay (1845), Stephen D., Jr. (1847), Dora or Theodora (1849), Mary and Carlton F. (1851), and Caroline S. (1854).

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